



THE GUIDEPOST

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Terra Cotta – Sewer Pipes, Building Material and Fine Art

Text by Jason Cohen; photos by Ulla Kaprielian

As City Guides, we are intrigued by the multitude of terra cotta building decoration we see in San Francisco. When the opportunity arose to visit the factory and learn more about it, we took it.

The town of Lincoln, California (30 miles northeast of Sacramento) began in 1861 as a railroad terminus on land that had been owned by railroad pioneer Theodore Judah. Civil War veterans settled in the area to raise cattle and orchards, and coal began to be mined in 1873. But the town's lasting importance was established in 1874, when a source of high quality clay was discovered nearby. Three Chicago businessmen, including Charles Gladding and Peter McBean, decided to open a clay products manufacturing plant. A year later Gladding McBean opened as the first producer of clay sewer pipe west of the Rockies. The plant's 6am whistle has been blowing every morning since!

Sewer pipe was, and continues to be, Gladding McBean's main product (along with roof tiles, chimney caps, and garden vases), but in 1884 the company began producing architectural terra cotta pieces for decoration of buildings. Terra cotta literally means "burned earth" and has been used since Roman times for architectural pieces and large statues.

Huge Success of Terra Cotta

Terra cotta was an extremely popular material for the walls of buildings from about 1890-1930. The beginning of this period is when skyscrapers were invented. Structural walls were replaced with internal steel frames—thus, the walls became simply curtains to keep out the weather. Terra cotta has advantages over materials like stone for curtain walls in that it is much lighter weight (and thus the building requires less of the expensive structural steel to hold it up), and it's less expensive to manufacture than having to pay stone masons to carve designs into granite or marble. For pieces with repeating designs or no design, the same mold can be used over and over.

Terra cotta also provides a fire insulation quality, which is required on steel frame buildings since steel will melt in a hot fire (as we witnessed on 9-11-2001). However, although terra cotta was billed as "absolutely fireproof" in Gladding McBean's ads, their buildings did not stand up well to the 1906 earthquake and fire. In fact, their headquarters building on Market Street in San Francisco was itself destroyed.

Following the earthquake, concrete became much more popular as a fire proofing material, with terra cotta remaining popular for decoration.

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Message from the Board

Here we are two thirds of the way through the summer! June's General Meeting was an educational and informative way to kick off the second half of 2009. For those of you who weren't there, we had three fantastic speakers.

Employment lawyer Diana Maier answered questions from guides and employers regarding rights and responsibilities of employee/employer relationships under San Francisco's health care laws and many of the State's labor laws. She is available to answer questions, provide support and counsel in employment matters, and she offers seminars on these topics.

You can contact her at (415) 515-1707 or at diana@dianamaierlaw.com. Architect Donald MacDonald gave a presentation about the architecture and retrofitting of the Golden Gate Bridge. He had copies of his book *Golden Gate Bridge, History and Design of an Icon* book for sale, which he autographed. They are also available at www.chroniclebooks.com.

Brenda Hepler inspired us to action. Her topic, the sexual exploitation of children, was not one that many were looking forward to, but Brenda was concise and powerful in her message of prevention through awareness. She introduced us to the Code of Conduct for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation in Travel and Tourism, a project of ECPAT-USA, the organization she represents, and the United Nations. Based on feedback at the meeting, the Board is taking the steps for SFTGG to sign the Code.

In both June and August, members visited Angel Island's recently reopened visitor center and were treated to a spectacular barbeque lunch. In July, we had a training tour to Monterey and Carmel, and held our second Trivia Night at Lefty O'Doul's. It was another fun evening of San Francisco minutiae and interaction between guides new to the business and those who know everything! Does anyone know what goes into a Pismo Punch? That was one thing even the bartenders couldn't answer.

The Board is working on several projects right now, including putting together a job fair and acquiring a proclamation from the city for our 25th anniversary. Details will follow as they become available. Mark your calendars: The National Federation of Tourist Guide Associations (NFTGA) has set a date and an itinerary for its 2010 Conference. It will be held on a cruise departing from Miami, February 22-26. The ship will call at ports in the Bahamas and Key West. Meetings and seminars will be scheduled around ship board events. An additional day of fam tours will be offered February 27. The Professional Tour Guide Association of Florida is hosting the event. NFTGA is fielding proposals for their next convention. If you are interested in SFTGG hosting such an event, let the Board know so that we can support you in putting together a committee and a proposal.

It may be wishful thinking, but it seems to me that business has been picking up ever so slightly. Let's hope that trend continues!

On behalf of the Board,
Michele McCurry, SFTGG President

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Another benefit of terra cotta is that it can be glazed in a wide variety of colors, textures and finishes to meet architectural specifications. Prior to the 1890s, buildings tended to be made of red/brown materials such as brick, which helped hide the soot from coal smoke. Architectural historians refer to this period as “the brown decades.” But the 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago (see the popular book *The Devil in the White City*), resulted in a national preference for shiny white buildings. Glazed terra cotta was the perfect material.



Each manufacturer employed a ceramic chemist whose full time job was developing new glazes. One of Gladding McBean’s most successful innovations was a glazed material called Granitex. It is almost impossible to tell apart from real granite.

The imitation stone is so convincing, that as we walk through downtown San Francisco today it can be very difficult to know if we’re looking at stone or terra cotta on the wall of a building. Here’s a clue—because terra cotta is brittle and can be chipped fairly easily, architects generally used real stone for the first few feet above the sidewalk, to resist damage from handcars, briefcases, etc. Above this, the wall cladding will often be terra cotta. On close observation you may see small chips in the surface, and if what’s behind the chipped surface is tan/brown in color, it’s probably terra cotta.

Production

The production of architectural terra cotta begins with the architect’s plans being sent to the factory’s drafting department. The plans are totally re-drawn, with the special needs of terra cotta in mind. For example, the pieces must be made extra large to account for the shrinkage that will occur during firing. Since the kiln temperature may vary depending on the color (and therefore the chemical make up) of the glaze to be used, the shrinkage factor needs to be carefully chosen.



The architect is sent the re-drawn plans for sign-off. Following this, modelers (under the direction of a sculptor) create the full size piece in clay, and the architect once again gives approval or revisions. A plaster mold is made from the model. Clay is pressed into the mold to the correct thickness, and allowed to dry. The mold is removed, and the piece is then hand finished with modeling tools. The piece must then dry for about a week to lessen the chance of warping or cracking in the kiln. Glazes are applied with an air brush, which can be an exacting process for pieces with

intricate color designs. “Burning” (firing) takes place in huge bee hive kilns (15 feet high, 18 feet diameter) over a period of 14 days – 1 day to load the kiln, 4 to slowly heat, 4 at full heat (about 2200 degrees Fahrenheit), 4 to slowly cool, and 1 to unload. Gladding McBean’s kilns were originally wood fired (until they had used all of the trees in the vicinity), and now use natural gas. Their gas bill today is about \$500,000 per month!

Finally, the finished pieces are packed in straw and shipped to the construction site, where masons attach them to the building using metal anchors and hangers, and then grout the pieces together. An ongoing problem was damage of pieces during shipment to the site, but since the original molds were retained, replacement pieces could be made quickly in small kilns.

Familiar Buildings

Gladding McBean provided terra cotta for more than 900 San Francisco buildings, along with hundreds in Los Angeles, Oakland, Portland, Seattle, and even as far away as Sydney and Tokyo. Though there were many competitors, Gladding McBean dominated the industry in the western U.S.

Here are just a few of the Gladding McBean buildings that

are familiar to us: at Civic Center City Hall, the Opera House, Veterans Building, and old Main Library (Asian Art Museum); Mark Hopkins and Ritz Carlton hotels (Ritz Carlton was originally an insurance company office); Spreckels Mansion (Danielle Steele); Matson and PG&E



buildings on Market Street; Timothy Pflueger’s Pacific Telephone Building on New Montgomery and Paramount Theatre in Oakland; the Hearst and Chronicle (deYoung) buildings at “Newspaper Corner” (Market & 3rd); Hunter Dulin Building (111 Sutter – Sam Spade’s office—the entrance foyer is especially remarkable); Hobart Building (Market & 2nd—architect Willis Polk’s favorite building); and Montgomery Street skyscrapers such as the Russ Building and the Mills Building. Even the white tiles in the Yerba Buena Island tunnel!



Even during our driving city tours we have a chance to point out some of these buildings to our guests. If you are not familiar with them, take the time to walk around downtown, or take a City Guide tour to find out more.

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Biodynamic® Farming in the Wine Country

By Kim Booher & Ulla Kaprielian

There is Sustainable farming, Organic farming and then there is Biodynamic® farming.

According to Wikipedia's encyclopedia:

- Sustainable agriculture refers to the ability of a farm to produce food indefinitely, without causing severe or irreversible damage to the ecosystem by replenishing the soil while minimizing the use of non-renewable resources, such as natural gas (used in converting atmospheric nitrogen into synthetic fertilizer), or mineral ores (e.g., phosphate). Possible sources of nitrogen that would, in principle, be available indefinitely, include: recycling crop waste and manure, growing crops such as legumes, peanuts or alfalfa that form symbioses with nitrogen-fixing bacteria called rhizobia.
- Organic farming is the form of agriculture that relies on crop rotation, green manure, compost, biological pest control to maintain soil productivity, excluding or strictly limiting the use of synthetic fertilizers and synthetic pesticides, plant growth regulators, livestock feed additives, and genetically modified organisms.
- Biodynamic® agriculture is a method of organic farming that treats farms as unified and individual organisms, emphasizing balancing the holistic development and interrelationship of soil, plants, animals as a closed, self-nourishing system. Biodynamic® farming has much in common with the above methods. Unique approaches include use of fermented herbal and mineral preparations as compost additives and field sprays and the use of an astronomical sowing and planting calendar. The concept of Biodynamic® farming originated with Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925).

This Austrian was said to have been a “multi-faceted genius” as well as a significant occultist. He called his philosophy “Anthroposophy,” known as “Spiritual Science.”

The term Biodynamic® is a trademark held by the Demeter Association (www.demeter-usa.org); it is not a government certification. The USDA has outlawed standards that exceed its National Organic Program standard.

The origins of this farming technique may be strange; the modern-day interpretation is sound. Essentially, Biodynamic® farming allows the farmer to look at their land as a living organism and encourages a well-rounded approach to agriculture. Rather than fighting and attempting to control nature, the farmer incorporates life cycles and the concept of the food chain to help their crops grow and thrive.

In March, a number of SFTGG members were introduced to this unique method of farming when we toured the Benziger vineyard. We heard about traditional farming methods versus advanced methods employed at the winery. Their wines are created using all three levels of the above farming practices, both by the winery at their 85-acre vineyard as well as by the grape-growers from whom they purchase grapes to supplement what they grow themselves.



On the tour, we were taken to the “Insectary,” a garden especially planted to attract insects away from the vines. Doing this makes the vines less attractive. Birds are more likely to visit this garden rather than the vines when the grapes are ripening. There are owl boxes throughout the vineyard, so the owls can take care of any small rodent issues. All of these features encourage a more holistic approach to farming that focuses on the circle of life and allows the land to take care of itself with as little human intervention as possible.

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Terra Cotta
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Great Depression to the Present

Terra cotta successfully made the transition to Art Deco and Art Moderne architecture in the 1920s and 1930s; however, very few large buildings were constructed during the Great Depression and World War II. When building finally resumed in the later 1940s, the Modern style, using glass and steel, became popular. Just as terra cotta was more economical than stone as a building material, glass and steel are less expensive than terra cotta. Thus, all of Gladding McBean's competitors went out of business by the late 1950s.



Gladding McBean was able to survive because of its core sewer pipe business. However, in recent times, much work has become available for architectural restoration projects. Gladding McBean, and some new, small companies, receive assignments to create replacement pieces when historic buildings are being restored. During a

recent tour, we were told they currently have a 13 year backlog of restoration projects!



The company has gone through various corporate acquisitions, but appears to be stable. The clay pit has enough raw material to last 350 years. And although Lincoln is no longer a company town, the plant still dominates the town physically. Gladding McBean is open for public tours each May during the "Feats of Clay" ceramic competition sponsored by Lincoln Arts. Hundreds of original models and

molds are stored museum-like in the old buildings, while glass-plate negatives of everything they produced are housed in the State Library. For information on tours see

www.lincolnarts.org

Sources:

- *Architectural Terra Cotta of Gladding McBean 1890-1930*, Gary F. Kurtz, 1989
- http://www.gladdingmcbean.com/terra_cotta/aboutus1.html
- Factory tour, May 2009, led by a Gladding McBean employee and a volunteer tour guide.

Biodynamic Farming
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As you can imagine, it is expensive to maintain a wholly Biodynamic® and/or Organic farm. Wineries must educate their grape-growing partners, helping them to meet the winery's standard and pay a premium for their grapes, thus supporting the Certified-Sustainable program.

This method is being used in a number of wineries in Spain and in France. In this country, wineries such as Araujo (Napa), Robert Sinskey (Napa & Sonoma), Grgich (Napa) and Benziger (Sonoma) have experienced success with Biodynamic farming.

Whether or not you believe that biodynamic farming sounds better than any other method of wine production matters little as long as you like the end product – a great glass of wine.

You can read more about Biodynamic® farming at the following websites:

www.biodynamics.com

www.demeterbta.com

Thank you to Rick Spear for the excellent tour of the Sonoma Valley, the visit to Benziger, Chateau St. Jean (lunch) and B. R.Cohn Wineries.



Green Brae Brick Kiln

(From The Guidepost Vol. 7 No. 4 – Fourth Quarter 1991)

In 1865, three brothers, Pierre, Helaire, and Edward Remillard, began a modest brick business in Oakland, California. The Remillard Brick Company, of which the Green Brae brick kiln is the only surviving structure, was by 1900 the largest brick-making firm on the Pacific Coast. During their years of operation the Remillard's [sic] supplied bricks used in the construction of St. Mary's College in Oakland, Ghiradelli [sic] Square and the Cannery, the original Palace Hotel, the St. Francis and Clift Hotels, and the Phelan and Flood Buildings in San Francisco.



In 1891, the Remillard brothers purchased 110 acres on the San Quentin Peninsula and built the Green Brae Brick Kiln. The brickyard functioned as a small community with worker housing, a cookhouse, stables, blacksmith shop, vegetable gardens and an orchard. Tubb Lake was created to provide a water supply for domestic and manufacturing uses, a small railroad transported clay from nearby Hutchinson Quarry, and a private landing on the Bay provided access to the five company scow schooners which carried millions of bricks to San Francisco.

The kiln itself is one of the few remaining examples of the Hoffman [sic] type kiln in the United States. This type of kiln was invented by Freidrich [sic] Hoffman of Berlin, Prussia, in 1865. The Hoffman kiln provided continuous firing of brick, as opposed to the previous batch method, revolutionizing the manufacturing of brick. The kiln was also enclosed by a large wooden structure, further protecting workmen and the firing process from the weather, and thereby extending the months of operation. The Green Brae Brick Kiln is unique in that the chimney stack [sic], which withstood the 1906 earthquake, is freestanding from the kiln and is fed by an underground flue system. Indeed the kiln supplied much of the brick required to rebuild San Francisco after the 1906 earthquake.

Pierre Remillard died in 1904, leaving control of his business to his widow Cordule and his daughter Lillian. They were forced to close the Green Brae Brick Kiln in 1915 due to economic problems, and

the last of the Remillard brick kilns in San Jose was shut down in 1968.

Lillian married the Count Alessandro Olioli Dandini de Cesena in 1932, and in later years the Count left her and remarried. A succession of lawsuits followed, some over who should control the brick works and some over the Count Dandini's second marriage, and the eventual court rulings resulted in today's California Bigamy Laws. The Countess continued to be active in the Bay Area social scene, organizing the San Francisco Opera Company, acting as president of the Pacific Opera Company and constantly opening her home to diverse organizations for innumerable concerts.

The Countess Dandini's lifelong dream was the preservation of the brick kiln in homage to her father, Pierre; however, she passed away in 1973 prior to the project being completed. In the early 1970's [sic] Robert H. Lee and two other local developers bought the remaining Brick Kiln property from the Countess who also passed along many original artifacts of historic note. Mr. Lee has since donated these artifacts to the present owners, Intermark Interests, Inc.

In 1987, Intermark undertook the restoration of the long abandoned brick kiln, and after over a million dollars in structural renovation, Remillard's Restaurant is now operating in the kiln, a dream become reality.

Contributed by Marystella Church

Green Brae Brick Kiln – Update

By Renate Coombs



In 1989, the Office of Historical Preservation in cooperation with Intermark placed a plaque at the site of California Historical Landmark No. 917 located at 125 E. Sir Francis Drake Blvd in Larkspur – none other than the Green Brae kiln that is the Remillard Brick Company's last remaining structure. This plaque acknowledges that the kiln is also an

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engineering landmark of statewide significance.

Most likely, the majority of motorists passing the site on their way to or from the Richmond-San Rafael bridge pay more attention to other roadside attractions such as the Larkspur Ferry Terminal, the large Don Quixote sculpture or the notorious San Quentin Prison than to the tall brick chimneystack set back from the road; but here in Oakland, Walking Tour Guides regularly mention the Remillard family. The occasion is the gracious 20-room Queen Anne style home Pierre built for his family in Oakland in 1887.



Jack London fans like to speculate whether he ever set foot into the Remillard home. While a student at Oakland High, he was tutored in French by Miss Lillian!

Photographs by Robert Coombs and Roger Diehnel

Still in its original location on a big corner lot on 13th Street, the elegant three-story structure is now the anchor for Preservation Park, a collection of Victorian gems. At first glance, it may be surprising that the wealthy

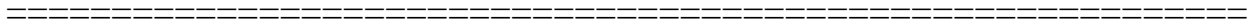


brickyard owner's home is made entirely of wood without a single brick in sight. But then it must be remembered that in the late 19th century, bricks were considered an "industrial" construction material. Just around the

corner from the Remillard home, the First Unitarian Church, a massive 1890 Romanesque structure, is largely built with Remillard brick. If bricks were used for fashionable houses, it was only for the foundation as in the Pardee Home, a nearby Italianate Villa now a museum.

While the family lived in the handsome Queen Anne house until Pierre's death in 1904, Pierre's daughter Lillian eventually acquired a home made of Remillard brick. Then known as the Countess Dandini, she bought the 92-room Hillsborough chateau called The Carolands. This monumental structure, now also a California Historical Landmark, had originally been built for the heiress to the Pullman railroad car company fortune.





SFTGG PROGRAMS

For information check our website at www.sftgg.org/programs or call Program Chair Persons

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